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AUTHOR Wissler, Dorothy Fast
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ABSTRACT

Under the superintendent's guidance, the Riverside (California) Unified School District underwent decentralization between 1960 and 1978. The process involved seven stages: (1) conceptualizing and actualizing a "cooperative community" committed to educating every child, (2) communicating these concepts to key individuals, (3) restructuring the central office to accommodate a new orientation toward service, (4) recasting the superintendent's support staff, (5) challenging principals to become instructional leaders, (6) involving representative teachers directly in decision-making, and (7) establishing a method for regularly renewing commitment to decentralization. The superintendent's role was critical and required a leadership style designated as "intentional." Contact was maintained with persons at all levels inside and outside the school organization, rather than through hierarchical channels. The primary "instruments" used by the superintendent in the process were intelligence, instruction, and integrity. Decentralization led to greater activity by the school board, more openness and cooperation in the central office, the taking of more risks by principals, and teachers' changing their teaching styles and attitudes. The information upon which this report is based was gathered through interviews; a review of documents including board minutes, newspapers, and staff directories; and observations of a class taught by the superintendent in question. (PGD)

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Decentralization of Decision Making: Riverside Revisited An Historical Analysis

By
Dorothy Fast Wissler, Ph.D.
San Bernardino Valley College
San Bernardino, California

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Decentralization of Decision Making:

Riverside Revisited An Historical Analysis

An investigation into the decentralization of decision-making process in the Riverside Unified School District yielded a theoretical statement regarding school governance. Two major components: the decentralization of decision-making process and the leadership style of the superintendent were identified as critical. The nature of school governance was determined by the process in which decision-making was decentralized in the school district and by the manner in which the superintendent conducted the process. This paper will review the decentralization of decision-making process first and then present a brief description of the leadership style of the superintendent. The report will conclude with the changes in the organization which resulted from the new nature of school governance in the district.

The definition of decentralization of decision-making for this study is that social relationships have been transformed. The literature presents two major ways in which decentralization of decision-making takes place. The first is adminsitrative decentralization which retains decision-making inside the organization. The second is to share decision-making control with the community. Both types are reported to have been attempted in various places during the 1970's. This study defined decentralization of decision-making as having occurred when internal as well as external organizational social relationships, person-person, person-group, group-group, had been transformed. The work differed from others which have been reported in three ways: 1) the definition of decentralization, 2) the detailing of the process and 3) the demonstration of success.

The decentralization of decision-making process took place in seven stages. Each step in the process had a definite purpose (why), was carefully planned with strategies and tactics (how), and produced the greater part of the desired results. The stages are presented below.

1) Conceptualization of a "vision" of a "cooperative community" by the superintendent and an "intention" to actualize such a community in the school district in order to fulfill the true mission of the school which is instruction of each child to his potential. 2) Communication of these concepts to key organizational members in order to garner support for them. 3) Central office personnel restructuring through cuts, confrontation and curtailing in order to change its motives from commanding to servicing the school district. 4) Cadre building around the superintendent to compliment his strengths and weaknesses and to serve as emissaries to the process. 5) Challenging principals to become instructional leaders and to make instructional decisions. 6) "Clustering" teachers which was to draw 100 teachers into the center of the decision-making for the district by giving them direct access in a regular and on-going basis to the superintendent and to the board of education without intervening levels of hierarchy. Stage six was the heart of the decentralization of decision-making process and it took the intentional leader of the organization 16 years to reach this stage. 7) Re-Centralization to a degree of the district. Decentralization was found to be a process which is on-going. It is on-going because it must be taught, and because the natural propensity of western organizations is toward centralization.

The requisite leadership style for actualizing decentralization of decision-making was intentional. The concept of intentional is derived from Winter (1966) who wrote that in intention

the issue is one of cultural integrity---of actualizing rights

> which are implicit in the social order. He may sense that the interests of a submerged group need to be recognized and extended. Or, he may believe that new values need to be apprehended and embodied in new structure for the society (284).

The superintendent began the decentralization of decision-making process with the fundamental intention to fulfill the district's public school organization's goal of educating every child to the fullest. This act required organizational social relationship transformation which was most obvious in the resulting equalization between groups and persons. Therefore, the second aspect of this leadership was that it was inclusive, so that persons and groups from inside or outside the organization, or from the upper or lower ranks of either the organization or community were involved in the educational processes of their youth. Thirdly, the leader made changes incrementally in a systematic, consistent manner, so that the process or means by which the changes were taking place was granted as much importance as the ends. The instruments used by the leader were intelligence, instruction and integrity. The organization changed structurally from an hierarchy of offices to a circular system of services. (See Figure 1).

Intelligence was used in two different ways: 1) A person in the central office was retained to fulfill the function of an intellectual. He reviewed and synthesized relevant research, formulated theoretical statements and provided discussion materials for the superintendent and others throughout the school district. 2) Expertise and knowledge were sought from all and ideas were accepted for experimentation without fear of retaliation if error resulted.

Besides focusing on instruction for children, instruction was the primary mode by which the superintendent related to all throughout the district. But,

more importantly, the prevalent norm was that all who were engaged in the process of servicing or instructing children were learning in the process. What this meant was that when something did not work, there was security in trying something else.

Integrity was part of the process. The superintendent and his purposes were trusted. For example, when the minority community was asked by a state official who could be trusted to serve it well, Mr. Berry's name was submitted. A different case is when teachers needed to divide a classroom into two, the superintendent saw that it was accomplished overnight. The organizational members, therefore, felt secure in the superintendent's integrity. But, associated with this, the rest of the organizational members held each other responsible for upholding trust, justice and fairness. This made it possible for members in the schools to risk experimenting and asking for help. In sum, the leadership style requisite for effective decentralization of decision-making consisted of using intelligence, instruction and integrity as instruments for the conduct of schooling. (See Figure 2).

Among the many indicants proving decentralization of decision-making the change of metaphors is illustrative. While the district was centralized the prominant metaphors were military. During the decentralization of decision-making process the metaphors changed to those of flight. The military metaphors were: chief officer, command, graded levels, rank, superior officers, line or staff officers, subordinates, chain of command, orders, "fight" to get to the top, maneuver, outflank, target the competition, and "pin it down." The flight metaphors were: "reach for it," top flight people, reach for the stars, fly your wings, tie your tail to a kite and you have to be prepared to go with it, the sky is the limit, create blue sky experiences for children.

Changes which took place in the organization as a result of the decentralized decision-making affected all participants. The board became more active. The system formulated its policy based on early, wide, public inclusion. The organization searched for a new type of personnel. Additionally, the harder issues of education were faced in order to provide education for all regardless if they were college bound or not.

The process as it involved the central office changed communication patterns inside and outside the office to one of listening; changed decision-making to consensus; changed work style to facilitation; changed orientation to a primary focus on instruction; fostered an acceptance of the importance of evaluation and enhanced the atmosphere of trust to the point of acceptance of open disagreement.

The effects for principals of the changed decision-making process meant they were no longer just to follow the rules to "cover their hind quarters" no matter what the results. They had to take risks and produce. They were to make decisions. With research they were to present their plans to their peers and as their schools no longer had to be alike neither did their programs. They were no longer to face only toward the central office and the school board but could turn toward the staff, children, and parents to serve a unique set of needs. A further result of principal leadership and autonomy was that it was "tremendous for morale."

Decentralization thrust teachers into a position of new importance and responsibility. They were to make decisions. Teachers reported their work style changed. They searched for ways to cooperate with each other in teaching children. They communicated and worked together to help each other become better teachers. Teacher work style with children broadened as they related to and accepted differences in children. An increased acceptance and sensitivity developed to all children. Teachers sat in meetings as peers; they knew what was

happening in the district; and they were heard. Administrators listened to them. Teachers arranged class size and combinations and helped select new principals.

Besides changes in teacher work style with each other, children, parents and administrators, there were changes in terms of attitude, vigor, caring, commitment, and willingness to spend time. The data show a "blossoming of leadership particularly among principals and teaching staff." It was felt this resulted from their experiencing the fact that they did have input and opportunities to effect change.

These and other positive changes which flowed from decentralized decision-making and intentional leadership seriously challenge current perceptions of what ought to be the concern of successful school administrators which is centralization. This work documents school organizational behavior "of what perhaps may be if we are but trained to it" (Follett, 1941).

Thus, what this study demonstrates most significantly is that in the process of decentralizing decision-making schooling was transformed. Children and instruction assumed primary importance. All school personnel directed their efforts to the task of instructing and servicing children. Parents and community members engaged in servicing children's schooling. These activities and actors were under the intentional direction of the leader who viewed the process or means as important as the ends in the conduct of educating his school district's youth.

Methodology

The study investigated the decentralization of decision-making process between the years 1960 to 1978 in order to frame the years of the greatest amount of decentralization demand in the United States and to allow comparative study of the district under two superintendents. It is a basic case study and an historical

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analysis. Data gathered for this investigation consisted of information from interviews, documents, and observations.

Twenty persons were formally interviewed. The sample represented three ethnic groups, both sexes, differing education and socioeconomic status, and school positions. Informants worked in the central office, schools, homes, and the community. The sample contained persons with different philosophies, opinions, experiences, and positions. Permission was obtained from all but two people to tape record the interview. Copies of the transcriptions were mailed to those who requested them for any additional comments they wished to make. Additional comments were made by two persons. No one deleted pertinent material from the transcriptions. The interviews resulted in 196 pages of single-spaced typed data. The data were placed on several hundred note cards under categories and filed according to subject. As closely as possible a basic group of the same questions were asked each person. The researcher verified and contrasted data and data sources to reconstruct the history of the event as closely as possible through probing interviewees and checking the information against other interviews, newspaper articles, board minutes, organizational charts and other material, and research published about the district.

Seven types of documents were collected for this study: 1) internal organizational communications, 2) organizational communication with external groups, 3) communication with parents and parent organizations of the school, 4) local and other newspapers, 5) board minutes, 6) budgets, and 7) miscellaneous research reports, books, letters and personal papers.

Board minutes for the years 1960 to 1978 were read two times. Extensive notes were taken. Portions bearing on decentralization were tape recorded, typed, categorized onto file cards and filed according to subject. There was a total

of 164 pages of board notes which were treated in this manner.

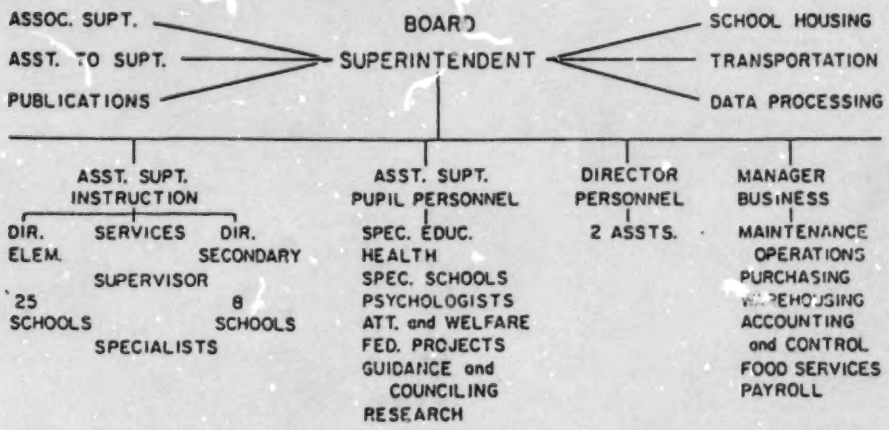
The city newspapers were scanned through the use of the Riverside Press Enterprise clipping file and through the microfilm collection at the University of California, Riverside. School district newspapers were also read. Articles were zeroxed. A total of 66 pages of notes was made and indexed. District personnel and parents also provided other documents concerning the process.

An intensive study and analysis of the changes in positions and titles in The Public School Directory for Riverside County was made from 1960 to 1979. This analysis provided proof of the movement from centralization to decentralization in the district. Organizational charts were also scrutinized. E. Raymond Berry, the chief informant, allowed unrestricted search of his personal files concerning the district. These files contained private and public communications with the board, district officers, teachers, parents, students, and citizens regarding the district. The only restriction was that clearance should be sought before there was any publication from the confidential correspondence.

The third data collection technique was the observation of a class titled, "The School Principal," taught by Mr. Berry. The observation took place during the fall quarter of 1982.

Part of the analysis included drawing profiles in order to compare, contrast, and cross reference all materials. Data analysis proceeded through comparison and analytic induction in the manner of N. K. Denzin (1977) which is seen as an attempted synthesis of all models of analysis.

THE STAFFING CHART WHICH EXISTED PRIOR TO FULL DECENTRALIZATION WAS ROUGHLY :



PREDECENTRALIZED ORGANIZATIONAL CHART RUSD. (SOURCE: FROM A REPORT TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION ON THE ORGANIZATION AND DIRECTION OF THE DISTRICT, BERRY, 1971:16).

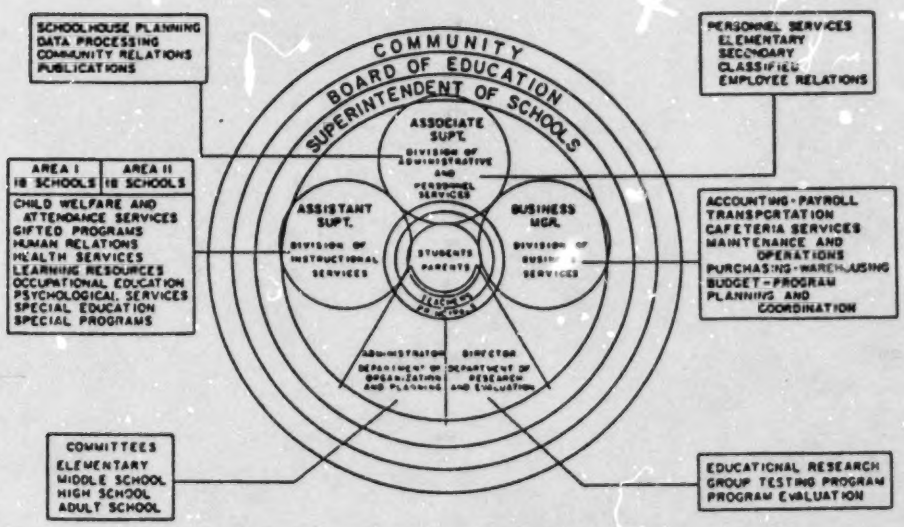


FIGURE 1 ORGANIZATIONAL CHART FOR DECENTRALIZED DISTRICT RUSD 1971 (FROM A REPORT TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION ON THE ORGANIZATION AND DIRECTION OF THE DISTRICT. BERRY, 1971:17).

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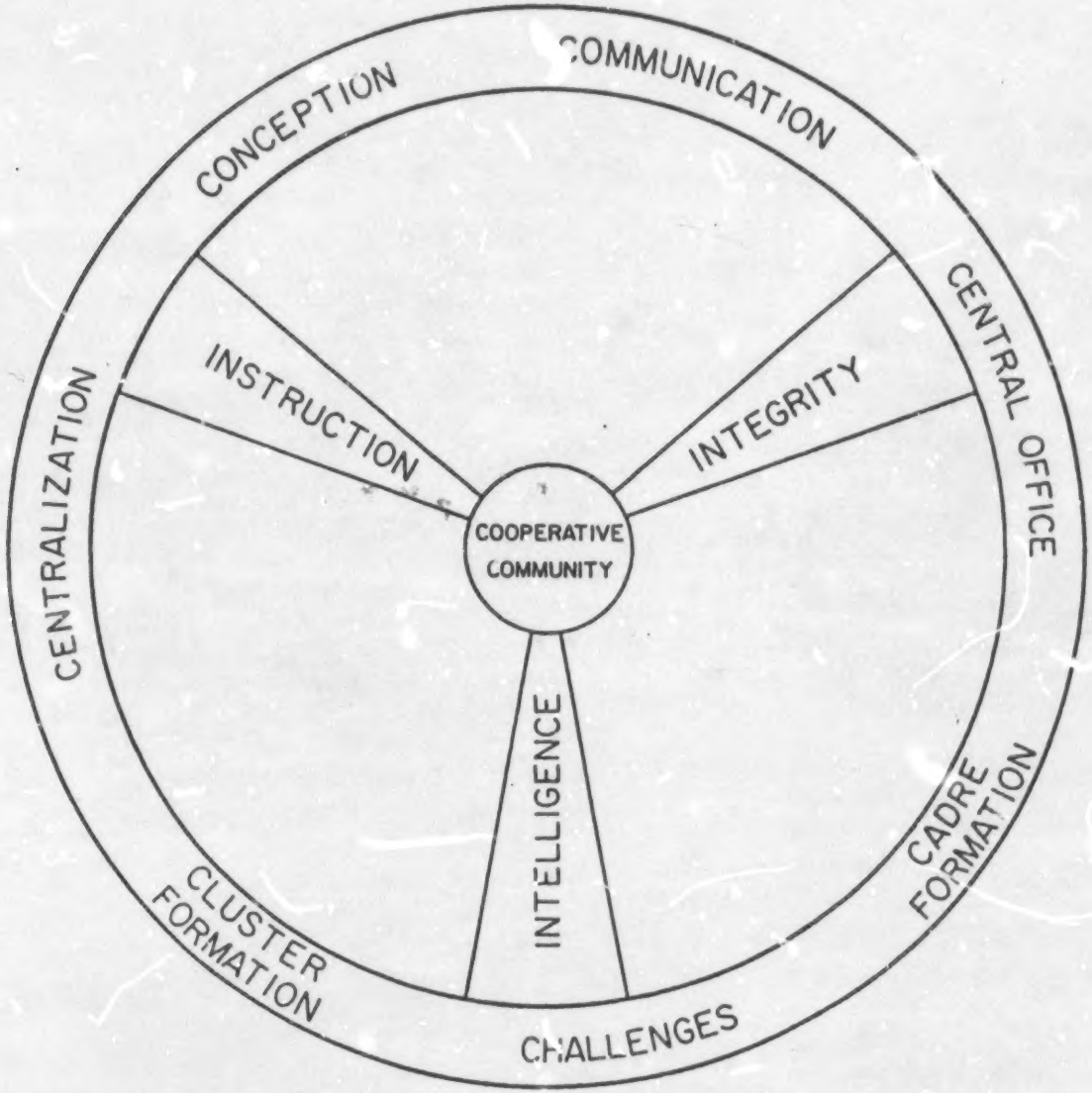
INTENTIONAL INCLUSIVE INCREMENTAL FLYING WHEEL MODEL



FLIGHT METAPHOR

"The sky's the limit."
"Cluster together"
"Tie your tail to a kite"
"No free rides."
"30 or 40 satellites"
"Flying together"
"Top flight people"
"Blue sky experiences for kids"

(Peters and Waterman–feverish and dauntless entrepreneurs who let their imaginations FLY in all directions : 14)

(The findings from the excellent companies amount to an upbeat message : xxv)

(The problems of management are circular : 4)

FIGURE 2

"the wheels were lifted up."
(Ezekiel, 1:19)

"Ezekiel saw the wheel a way up in the middle of the sky."